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ABSTRACT

Intended to help teachers of law-related education direct student's critical thinking by examining case studies in everyday newspapers, this booklet contains seven activities suitable for use with intermediate and secondary students. By examining daily newspapers and participating in the activities, students (1) determine ways in which the law affects their daily lives; (2) focus attention on newspaper coverage of crimes committed; (3) become aware of the use of contracts in daily life and how a "breach of contract" can lead to court; (4) develop advocacy skills, broaden their knowledge of courtroom procedures, and enhance their abilities to determine evidence based on facts; (5) become aware of consumer law; (6) examine the nature of newspaper coverage of juvenile cases; and (7) attend a trial in progress at the nearest courthouse. Although activities are designed for use with "The Dallas Morning News," they are general enough for use with any daily newspaper. For each lesson, objectives, procedures, follow-up activities, and lesson variations are presented. Repetition of the activities with different editions of the newspaper can be used to extend the lessons. (LH)

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CASE STUDIES EVERY DAY

Using
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS
in

LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

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CASE STUDIES EVERY DAY

INTRODUCTION

ACTIVITIES

1. It's All in the Newspaper
2. Crimes Committed: Give Me the Facts
3. Contract Law: Sign on the Dotted Line
4. Courtroom Procedure: Spontaneous Courtroom
5. Consumer Law: Buyer Beware
6. Juvenile Law: Too Young To Know Better?
7. Field Trip

INTRODUCTION

To The Teacher:

In our society, the method of resolving conflict is a system of LAWS, not of people. In fact, that body of laws affects us every day of our lives, in one way or another. As citizens, our task is to periodically evaluate our use of the law and to determine if we indeed are benefiting our society, not hindering it. Through law-related education and a better informed citizenry, this evaluation process is greatly enhanced.

The following teacher's quide is designed to direct your students' critical thinking toward our system of laws by looking at law in action. The materials presented in this guide have been developed in the belief that newspapers can be a relevant means to show students the law in real life.

Every day, newspapers provide coverage of trials in progress in all areas of the law, as well as reports of crimes committed, providing students with the raw materials for speculation and discussion of the legal system. This guide is designed to aid educators in introducing students to the intricacies of our judicial system, including specific areas such as youth and the law; the court system; due process; and legal procedure in both criminal and civil law. Other areas easily examined in the newspaper are consumer law, social issues and family law. Additionally, the use of this guide will familiarize students with use of the daily newspaper as a means of being well-informed citizens.

To accomplish the activities in this guide, you will need a classroom set of *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS,* at least once a week, for six weeks or longer. Repetition of the activities with different editions of the newspaper will provide a variety of experiences and help your students build the newspaper reading habit.

ACTIVITY 1:

IT'S ALL IN THE NEWSPAPER

TEACHING OBJECTIVES:

Students will determine how many ways and in what ways the law affects our daily lives, and see how that is reflected in the daily newspaper.

PROCEDURE:

Divide the class into groups of four, and have students quickly look for any law-related article, feature story or cartoon in a recent edition of *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS.*

Have students circle the headlines of the articles that deal with law enforcement, law making or conflicts with the law.

As a team, have members sort the articles into four or five categories, such as criminal law, juvenile law, consumer law, etc.; or law making, judicial decisions, etc.

On large sheets of paper, have each team make a chart of the categories they have created, and list the headlines of their articles under each category.

FOLLOW-UP:

Have the teams display their charts, and discuss the various classifications of articles as well as the following questions:

1. What conclusions can you make about the law affecting our daily lives?
2. In what way or ways does a newspaper help resolve legal issues in our society? Is this function important? Why or why not?
3. Comparing your chart with the teams' charts, what differences do you see? What similarities?

CRIMES COMMITTED

ACTIVITY 2: # GIVE ME THE FACTS

TEACHING OBJECTIVE: Students will focus attention on newspaper coverage of a specific law article classification: crimes committed.

PROCEDURE: Have your students look in *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* for a report of a crime committed. There will be several from which to choose. Have the class decide on one story you will discuss. Direct them to select a story that would be significant to the community and would have more coverage for follow-up.

In class discussion, have students point out the evidence reported that would support the prosecution in a trial, and the evidence that would be used in defense. List the evidence in two columns on the chalkboard.

Direct students to watch for further reports of the case in the newspaper to discover the actual resolution.

FOLLOW-UP: Have students consider the following questions:

1. Do you think all of the evidence has been presented in the news story?
2. If not, what reasons might there be for its omission? (Some possibilities: police are not releasing information; reporter was unable to get information from both sides, etc.)
3. Should police release all information to the newspaper? If not, why not?
4. Do you think the newspaper should cover both sides of the story thoroughly?
5. In this story, do you think the coverage is fair and impartial?

GIVE ME THE FACTS

VARIATION 1: Divide the class into two teams, one gathering evidence from the story for the prosecution, the other for the defense.

Give each team time to prepare a presentation of the evidence reported.

Have one team member present his team's arguments before the entire class, as if he or she were actually arguing the case before a court.

Have the class then vote on two issues:

1. Verdict based upon evidence presented.
2. Which team presented the better arguments.

VARIATION 2: Use this process to analyze a civil case, looking for a "preponderance of the evidence," or which side presents a greater weight of the evidence.

VARIATION 3: Repetition of this activity on a weekly basis can produce strikingly different results, in that the cases reported in the newspaper will always be different and will present different challenges.

ACTIVITY 3: SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE

TEACHING OBJECTIVE: Students will be made aware of the use of contracts in daily life and how a "breach of contract" can lead to court.

PROCEDURE: Have your students go to today's edition of *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* to look for a major story that deals with contracts in dispute. (The sports pages and business pages are good places to find stories about contractual agreements.) From the various stories they find, have the students choose one that is prominent enough to be covered in future editions of the newspaper. Have them read the story carefully to get as much information as possible.

In class discussion, have students determine what aspects of the contract protect or favor each of the parties involved. In the dispute, have students determine the plaintiff and the defendent; then consider the facts on both sides.

Determine which side seems to have the preponderance of the evidence, based on this account.

Watch for follow-up stories to see how the dispute is settled.

FOLLOW-UP: Focus students' attention on the following questions:

1. Was the case ultimately resolved in court? By some other means? In whose favor was it resolved?
2. Was the follow-up in the newspaper given the prominence that the breaking story was given? If not, why do you think it wasn't?
3. What formal or informal contracts are high school students likely to be parties in? (They may cite auto or other types of loans; the understanding that they must complete certain work in school in order to graduate; and others like this.)

SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE

VARIATION: Divide the class into groups of four and have each group select a different article to consider by the same method as outlined above.

Have each group report on its findings by briefly describing the contract agreement, describing the conflict, then presenting their lists of facts supporting each side.

By use of voice vote, have the class decide for the plaintiff or the defense in each case. Follow up with a discussion about why they voted the way they did.

ACTIVITY 4: SPONTANEOUS COURTROOM

TEACHING OBJECTIVE: Students will develop advocacy skills, broaden their knowledge of courtroom procedures and enhance their abilities to determine evidence based on facts.

PROCEDURE:

Have students look in *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* for an article about a trial in progress.

Divide the class into four groups. Group 1 will represent the prosecution/plaintiff and will prepare their case based upon the facts in the article.

Group 2 will represent the defense and will prepare their case based on the facts and evidence in the article.

Group 3 will do two things. They will first establish the facts to make an opening statement before a presiding judge. Then they will use those facts and divide into witnesses for the trial proceeding. Each side should have two witnesses, if possible.

Group 4 will act as judges, studying the article on their own before it is presented by both sides. (Group 4 might act as jury in the trial, instead of as judges, and not be allowed to read the article describing the case before it is argued.)

Have each side present its arguments and evidence before the court by questioning the witnesses and soliciting pertinent facts from them.

By means of a discussion, have judges make their decision and tell why they decided the way they did.

Watch *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* for further coverage of the trial, and see how the outcome compares to the class decision.

SPONTANEOUS COURTROOM

FOLLOW-UP: Focus students' attention on the following questions:

1. Do you feel that newspaper coverage of a trial in progress is helpful to the general public in being well-informed citizens?
2. How does newspaper coverage of a trial illustrate the first amendment, freedom of the press?

ACTIVITY 5: BUYER BEWARE

TEACHING OBJECTIVE: Students will become aware of how intertwined law is in our daily lives, even in the products we buy.

PROCEDURE:

Have students find articles or advertisements from *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* which deal with consumer products and/or services. A short article is preferred.

As students read the articles or ads, have them note how many laws are involved.

Divide the class into several groups, and have each group pick out the areas in each article or ad which are governed by law.

Take a poll to see which group has the greatest number of examples of law-related statements. Then discuss the article or ad in class, being sure to point out what laws apply to the fact situation described.

FOLLOW-UP:

Focus students' attention on the following questions:

1. How do laws in the various areas mentioned in class discussion help protect the consumer?
2. Should laws also protect the manufacturer or seller of products and services? Explain why or why not.
3. How might a news article relating to consumer law help protect our system of buying and selling?
4. In what ways, if any, could a news article harm our buying and selling system?

ACTIVITY 6: TOO YOUNG TO KNOW BETTER?

TEACHING OBJECTIVE: Students will be made aware of juvenile law, look at the law in relation to themselves, and understand the nature of newspaper coverage of juvenile cases.

PROCEDURE: Divide the class into four teams, and have each team find an article in *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* that deals with a juvenile 16 years old or younger who is accused of a crime.

Have each team discuss the following questions and be prepared to make a group report of their answers:

1. What do you think should be done with the juvenile in this article? Why do you think so?
2. If the accused in your article were an adult, what do you think would be his or her punishment if found guilty?
3. According to the article, what punishment would be in store for the accused juvenile if found guilty?
4. Most juvenile offenders are not given the same punishment as an adult offender committing the same crime. In what ways do you think this is fair to the juvenile? In what ways would this be unfair?
5. In what way is the special treatment of juvenile offenders fair to society? In what ways might it be unfair?

FOLLOW-UP: Have the class discuss these questions as a whole, with one team member presenting a general statement of his or her team's answer to each question. Allow time for others to contribute to the discussion.

FIELD TRIP

ACTIVITY 7: # THE COURTHOUSE BEAT

TEACHING OBJECTIVE: When it is possible, use this activity to illustrate all of the principles involved in activities one through six in this guide.

PROCEDURE:

Have students attend a trial in progress at the nearest courthouse.

Have each student act as a reporter for the day, with the assignment to write an article for *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* based on what is observed in court.

After the articles are written, have the students discuss the evidence to determine a possible verdict in this trial.

Have them watch for articles in *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* which cover the same trial, comparing their reporting to the newspaper reporter's. (Are the same facts reported? Does there seem to be a slant in the reporting of either *THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS* story or their own?)

FOLLOW-UP: As a class, discuss the importance of the news media in the courtroom. Why is it important?